[Reminiscences of Morgan's Raid]

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Grace Monroe,

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Morgan's Raid

REMINISCENCES OF MORGAn'S RAID BY AN OLD CITIZEN

OF JEFFERSON COUNTY

Reference: A- Mr. Middleton Robertson, Deputy, Indiana.

“On the 11th day of July 1863, General John H. Morgan and his army passed through Graham township, Jefferson county, in his flight through southern Indiana, from Kentucky to Ohio. It is not the purpose of this article to point out his objectives in making this invasion. The historians have already done this as satisfactorily, perhaps, as can be done.

General Morgan not being a trained soldier did not rank in ability with the best military leaders of the Southern confederacy, but he was a courageous officer and General Grant in authority for the statement that in his military operations in Kentucky and Tennessee Morgan killed, wounded and captured several times the member under his command at any one time.

At the time of the raid I was not at home in Graham township which was less than a mile from the line of march of the enemy army, but was away temporarily visiting my uncle, Dr. N. D. Gaddy, at Weston, in Jennings county, and so did not see any of the rebels.

Of course there were no telephones or radios in those days, but we kept fairly well advised as to what was going on outside of our community. Hearing of a movement among the citizens to assemble at Vernon and engage the enemy in battle, my uncle joined them.

I see him now through the eyes of memory as he rode away that Sunday morning in company with some of his neighbors, his rifle on his shoulder and with enough bullets in his ammunition pouch that I had helped him mould, to send the [sould?] of scores of rebels to purgatory. The day passed, but no sound of cannon came our way, leading us to believe there was no battle in progress. After hours of waiting for him, my uncle returned, not bearing on his person any marks of carrage or strife, but bringing the glad tidings that Morgan had gone without unleashing his guns in the destruction of 2 life or property.

Not years prior to his death, G. W. Whitsitt, who for a long period was well known in this part of the county by reason of his musical talent, informed me that he was in Vernon at that critical period of its history, and that a regiment of Union soldiers from Michigan were there, also a considerable number of citizen soldiers, and that he was present and over-heard a conversation between General Lee Wallace who was in command and the colonel of the Michigan regiment, in which the latter begged permission to lead an attack against the enemy, but the general was firm in his opposition alleging that in view of the superior strength of the fee, such a move would result in a useless waste of life.

The most vivid remembrance I have of any experience in these troubulous times was of a happening a few day after Morgan had gone out of the state. Two men came along, riding fast and furiously past my uncle's, pausing just long enough to tell us that the rebel general, Forrest, has destroyed Paris by fire and was coming our way, [buring?] buring burning buildings and killing men. My uncle assigned me two tasks-one to assist in burying a box of silver coins amounting in value, I suspect, to several hundred dollars, any my other job was to walk over to the home of his father-in-law and give warning to the family of impending danger, the distance being about a mile and in part through a dark woodland. I was younger then than I am now, being in my 12th year and not overstocked with that admirable quality of the mind called courage. I discharged my trust, but not without realizing that the sense of fear had not been left out of my makeup. But the supreme peril was yet to come. It was not long until a body of armed men on horseback came into view. Surely, we thought, this must be Forrest and his army and the end of the world, but we

were unduly alarmed, for when the men came close, and I don't know why we did not run away, they told us they were not rebels, but for the Union, and it was they who were at Paris and that it was through the 3 distorted imaginations of some parties who had seen them that had spread the rumors of disaster and death. An imaginary danger for the time being is as nerve racking as an actual one, for while one thinks he is in danger, to him it is real and palpable. Learning that we had been deceived, whether intentionally of otherwise, by the excited horsemen, the black cloud of fear lifted and passed away, and from that day to this I have never felt any danger imminent to myself or country from armed rebellion or foreign fee.

About a fortnight after Morgan had come and gone I returned to my home in Graham township. The perspective was about the same, no marks of vandalism were observable except the loss of three good horses. There had been a forcible transfer of the title to ownership from the family to the Southern Confederacy.

On the morning of July 11th my brother, Philander, had gone to a mill about three miles east of our house on land now owned by [Hiren?] Poster, in a two-horse wagon, where he had exchanged wheat for flour. The day was fair and no portents were in the sky or impending danger until on the return trip he reached a point in the road apposite Pisgah church, when suddenly about fifty men appeared in view and soon demanded that he get out of the wagon and unharness the horses. Being slow to obey, they persuaded him to hurry by pointing their guns in his direction. They took the horses, and they were good ones, and made him walk in front of them to the creek, about half a mile north of the church, where they bade him go home. Before he reached home the marauders had visited the premises and taken from the stable a fine young black mare, the idol of the family. My oldest sister, Nancy, though habitually of a mild and equable temper, became so angry when she saw her pet mare being taken away, that she told those sons of Dixie that she thought them abusive, but she did not accomplish more than if instead she had

given them her blessing—the bension of good will, for they took her beautiful mare away and she never saw her more. This was one of the great sorrows of her life.

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My home was not the only one visited by the troopers. Almost all the good horses near the line of march had been taken. There was one marked exception. James Dowy Robertson, better known in this vicinity as “Uncle [Doc?],” lost only one horse and saved four. His eldest son, Melville, was home on his summer vacation from college and happened to look toward the south and saw a large body of horsemen in a high point in the road where John Stewart now lives, heading in the direction of his home, acting with quick presence of mind, he went to the barn and rushed off four good horses to a thicket in the back part of the farm and tied them near together so they did not get lonesome and whiny. All four horses escaped capture. Returning to the house he found home rebels ransacking it. Uncle Doc had recently became the owner of a new pair of fine boots and one rebel, evidently having some sense of humor, picked up the boots and said: “This fellow has some good boots and I believe I will trade with him,” and so he did. By reason of some offensive remark, Melville was compelled to go with the rebels as far as Dupont, where he was released. Later he joined the Union army, was captured in his first battle, east into a rebel prison and there contracted typhoid fever which ended his life—another sacrifice in the cause of human liberty.

Uncle Aquilla Robertson, better known as “Uncle Quill,” and a brother to Uncle Doc, was less fortunate than his brother in saving his horses, as all three of his were taken. His youngest daughter Mrs. Rebecca McClelland of Deputy, remembers well the leading events of the Morgan raid. This is her story: I lived with my father, less than half a mile of the road over which Morgan and his army passed. We could see the cavalry and artillery as they passed along the road. We first saw that they were nearly all day passing from about 8:30 in the forenoon. The most exciting scene in the drama was when a bunch of rebels come into the yard, clamoring for something to eat, one insistent fellow attempting to go into the kitchen in spite of a refusal of my stepmother to admit him, and so she

flourished a butcher knife in his face saying: “I'll let you know I am one of the blus hen's chickens from the state of Virginia and if you make any 5 further attempt to enter here I'll cut your heart out.” Eyeing her intently for an instant, the rebel said, “I know them Virginians will fight like the devil and I have no doubt you mean what you say.” He then went away and left her, for the time being, mistress of the situation.

Next morning July 12th at about 6:30, while we were at family devotions my father leading in prayer, several armed men in federal uniform entered, disregarding the usual civilities on entering a home, and in a rough and overbearing manner demanded something to eat. Being Union soldiers, we were glad to feed them. Father ended his prayer rather abruptly, as any other good man would have done under the circumstances. Regarding the number of men in each army, my impression is that according to the estimates of the people at that time that there were somewhere between four and five thousand men in each army.

This chronicle would not be complete without some reference to another prayer, but made on the day of the raid. There then lived in this township a local preacher, Reuben Rice by name. He was an ardent Methodist and a militant abolitionist. These facts together with his heavy artillery voice when in prayer made him a distinctive citizen in the community. It was currently reported and generally believed that some rebels called upon him and under threat of death commanded him to get down on his knees and pray for Jeff Davis and the success of the Southern government, which being under duress he did so, but “prayer being the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed”, it was really no prayer, but more lip service. It accomplished no good. Rice lived for years and scores of years after John Morgan and the southern confederacy were dead as an Egyptian mummy, and all through these years prayer was a part of his daily program. Maybe the rebels felt that their government needed praying for. It was certainly in a bad way at the time. Evidence was multiplying fast the the Lord was “Trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,” for one week before this time Lee and his splendid army were defeated at Gettysburg, and hurled back across the Maryland border, and Grant, after

long, patient and 6 laborous effort, had captured Vicksburg. Surely the clock had struck the hour marking the beginning of the end of the southern confederacy.

Dr. C. H. McCaslin, now of Kansas City, Mo., was at the time of the Morgan raid a boy of about my age, but much larger and braver. He lived on what is now the E. J. Wolf farm, the dwelling house being within 100 ft. of the road over which the armies of Morgan and Hobson passed. From a recent letter I rec'd from him, he had this to say about the Morgan raid: “When John Morgan's raid through Jefferson county occurred, I was plowing corn. I looked up the road and saw a company of soldiers on horseback. I supposed it was the home guard going to Washington, Indiana, where the company at Parid, Ind., had been ordered. Morgan had telegraphed Gev. Morton that he was going that way. My brother was at home on a furlow and he went with the Paris home guard. The rebels were all day passing our home, and I wish to state that my mother was sick in bed and I sent to the spring for water. An officer approached and asked if I wanted water. I told him my mother was sick and wanted a drink and he ordered his soldiers to stand back and let me fill my bucket. They had several carriages which in those days were known as rockaways. Whether General Morgan was riding in one of them or not, I cannot say. They took all of the horses within the radius of two or three miles on each side of the road. They told us there would be a larger army the next day and that they would burn houses and barns, but General Hobson and Shackelford of the Union army followed them.

There was an incident on the day of the raid that gave a touch of comedy to the tragic side of the picture. An aunt of mine whom I shall call “Aunt Julia,” who evinced considerable excitement when she learned that Morgan was near, lived in a large house well stored with valuable goods and furnishings. Wishing to salvage something of great worth from the coming destruction, in her confusion she selected a mirror and hastily took it to the garden and buried it. This seems ludicrous in view of the fact that she made no effort to save things more valuable, but perhaps there was [?] in her madness, 7 for, after all, what is there about a home which a woman prizes more than a looking glass?

If the searchlight of truth were applied to all the facts connected with the Morgan raid, it would awaken a memory not complimentary to the national government. Morgan's men, about as fast as they captured and appropriated good horses, discarded those they did not care to use longer, and quite a number of these horses were taken over by farmers and were fed, groomed and taken care of until they were fit for farm work. My brother appropriated two of these horses and just as he in common with his neighbors felt that they had some amends for their losses, the national government sent agents around and through might, not right, took possession of these horses without any compensation to the farmers whatever. This was not only flagrantly unjust, but it was obviously unwise. Here was a government in a great war and needing provisions to feed the armies and navies and were depending in part on these very farmers to supply the sinews of war in food stuffs and at the some time taking from them the means and the vehicles of production needful to help the cause along. Later a concerted effort was made to induce congress to appropriate money to reimburse the farmers for their losses sustained by reason of the stated, but these claims were never allowed.

For more then three score years and ten the body of John Morgan has slept in the dust of the earth, but the government he sought to destroy still lives at Washington and the flag he dishonored and tried to cast aside still waves in undimished splendor “o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.”